

# In The News

The Official Newsletter of the Portland VA Medical Center

## Winter 2010



***“Recharge...” Message from the Director***  
***Veterans Day: Remembering Together***  
***Stand Down: Reaching Out to Homeless Veterans***  
***Employee World-Class Competitors***



## *A Message from the Director...*

*John E. Patrick*

**A**s 2010 comes to a close, it is the perfect time for me to say Thank You for everything you have done this year at Portland VA Medical Center. I am filled with pride when I see the deep dedication and compassion from our staff and clinicians towards Veterans. Clearly, our staff and volunteers go above and beyond what is required to make sure Veterans receive exceptional care. It takes a team approach to accomplish what we do on a daily basis and every one of you are important to our success. You make PVAMC an outstanding place to work! While our technology, research, and patient care are exceptional, our people make the PVAMC an inspiring place throughout the year. During the holiday season and New Year, many of you will take time to reflect on the past year and your professional and personal accomplishments. Others will use the time to plan and coordinate the year ahead. Whatever your approach, take the time to pat yourself on the back for your contribution at PVAMC. You are all members of the finest medical organization in the world

and that is due to your hard work, dedication, and love of what you do. The holiday season means many different things to many different people. Often three themes emerge.

*It's about family. It's about friends. It's about taking the time to rest, refresh, and recharge.*

While we celebrate with friends, family, and loved ones, let us keep in mind the things that bring us together. It is a collaborative sense of purpose that allows us to make it through the tough days and to celebrate our success as a team when outcomes are good. You already know that caring for others requires many special skills and abilities. Compassion, understanding, patience, and even a sense of humor help us on a daily basis. When we take the time to celebrate during the holidays, we honor our families and ourselves, and ultimately honor those we serve. It is PVAMC's loyal and dedicated staff members and clinicians who are the driving force behind our mission.

*It is with the highest respect for your exceptional work for Veterans, that the executive staff and I wish you and your families a joyous holiday season and a new year filled with happiness.*





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**In The News** is an organizational  
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## ***2010 Holiday Parties!***

**December 20th**  
**Vancouver Campus**  
**Noon - 2 p.m.**  
**2nd Floor Lobby-**  
**New Specialty Care Bldg 20**

**December 21st**  
**Portland VA Medical Center**  
**1 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.**  
**Executive Office**

***“We thank you for your compassion  
and your support ...  
because no one should be hungry.”***

***From the Oregon Food Bank to the  
the Portland VA Medical Center  
for its recent donation of 628 pounds of food.***

## ***Why should you follow us?***

***Inclement weather messages,  
PVAMC happenings/updates,  
and good people!***

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# Veterans Day: Remembering Together

*Just a few images...*





# Navajo Code Talker

“One  
mistranslated  
word...  
death of  
thousands.”

Hollywood told the story on the “Silver Screen” but David Patterson lived the story. Patterson was a U.S. Marine Corp communications specialist in the Pacific more than 65 years ago. Not just as any communications specialist but as a Navajo Code Talker.

On Veterans Day, at Fort Vancouver Barracks Cemetery,

Patterson was the guest speaker at the Veterans Day Observance. The cemetery is the final resting place of four Medal of Honor recipients. “Two of the kids who went to school with me in New Mexico went on to receive Medals of Honor during World War II,” said Patterson. “This reflected the Code Talkers’ contributions to victory in the Pacific.”

The Navajo Code talkers started as a “pilot project” with 30 Navajos. They worked day and night helping to create the code and learn it. Once the code was created, the Navajo recruits were tested and re-tested. “There could be not mistakes in any of the translations, Patterson said. “One mistranslated word could lead to the death of thousands.”

Once the first 29 were trained, two remained behind to become instructors for future Navajo code talkers and the other 27 were sent to Guadalcanal to be the first to use the new code in combat. From



1942 to 1945, Navajo code talkers participated in numerous battles in the Pacific, including Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, Peleliu and Tarawa.

The Navajo code talkers played a large role in the allied success in the Pacific. The Navajos had created a code the enemy was unable to decipher. Over 3600 Navajo American Indians served in the Pacific but only 420 were code talkers.

Patterson was born November 11, 1922, which is why his son Mike shouted, “Happy birthday Dad!” during the Veterans Day event. The people of David Patterson’s generation were part of another chapter of history when they were born they weren’t citizens of the United States. It wasn’t until June 2, 1924, that Congress enacted the Indian Citizenship Act.

# Stand Down Eliminating Homelessness

*Helping Veterans one haircut at a time...*



Portland's Orchid Salon staff provided haircuts for Veterans who attended Stand Down

Gathering for haircuts, hot meals, job advice and benefit information, approximately 800 homeless veterans met at the Veterans Memorial Coliseum for the annual Stand Down on November 16-17, 2010. Sponsored by the Portland VA Medical Center and City Central Concern, Veterans were able to receive desperately needed care and information.

Eric Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, developed a plan to decrease the number of Homeless Veterans over the next five years. The plan will assist every eligible homeless and at risk for homeless Veteran. Across the country, Stand Downs, like the one recently in Portland, focuses on the Secretary's plan by offering a wide a range of necessities including food, clothing, medical services and mental health assistance.

At the Veterans Memorial Coliseum this year, the addition of the job fair included employees from the VA offering workshops on "How to apply for a VA Job" and how to use their "Veterans Preferences for Federal Jobs" benefit. About thirty potential employers set up tables with job openings from Clackamas County to Vancouver Washington. The companies were looking to hire Veterans, and Veterans were ready with resumes in hand and prepared for interviews.

According to Secretary Shinseki, "Partnering with homeless agencies across this county, we will attack the problems that underlie homelessness."



Carol Kedalo Administrative Specialist My HealtheVet Program



Ryan Green from Oregon Paralyzed Veterans Of America talks with a Veteran at Stand Down.





## “In Country” Veterans Give Back

Wearing their leather jackets, biker boots, and bandanas with insignias and colors flying, members of the In Country Vietnam Motorcycle Club wheeled their way up to the front doors of the Portland VA Medical Center in what was to be one of many special trips as **“Vets Helping Vets!”** The Portland VA Medical Center Acute Psychiatry Unit recently received musical instruments, reading glasses and some basic needs for our Veterans from the Oregon Chapter of the In Country Vietnam Motorcycle Club (ICVMC).

Club President “Whistle Bill”, aka Bill Griffith and “Grizz,” aka Rick Carignan, the VA Outreach coordinator, were searching for ways to provide help for basic needs for veterans. Asking questions and knocking on doors led them to the Acute Psychiatry Unit almost ten years ago. “That’s how we first met Grizz and Whistle Bill, Orangeman, Fish, Capt. Nemo, Rubedo, Springer Goerge, Iron Butt, Yaqui, and 8-Ball from the statewide association,” said Bonita Davis, Recreation Therapist. “They may have been a little

windblown, but they were driven to provide help for Veterans in need.

Grizz explained that members of the club are all Vietnam Vets who served in Vietnam - or “In Country.” The ICVMC club members Whistle Bill, Orangeman, Fish, Grizz, and their buddies, decided Acute Psychiatry would be their “dedicated official cause” and set out to learn what specific Veteran needs they could fill. The group searched for opportunities to “fill in the gap”, where no other resources were available. In addition to the need for reading glasses, they learned about other needs such as basic clothing needs such as socks, underwear, t-shirts, suspenders, hard to find sizes and sweats were in high demand.

It is a joy to see Grizz, and Whistle Bill and their fellow riders when they drop in for a visit. Staff and Veterans who have received care on the Acute Psychiatry Unit can hardly find the words to express the gratitude that we feel for “our biker guys!” Thank you ICVMC!!!

# Winner of the Portland Marathon

Portland VA Medical Center Researcher Runs 26 miles, 385 yards in 2:28:41

**Name:** Eric Griffiths

**Title:** Bio Science Lab Tech, working with a disease called Blau Syndrome, and currently looking for particular “phenotype.”

**How long have you been working here at the hospital?** 4 months

**How many years have you been running?** 12

**How many times a week do you run?**

In training for the Portland Marathon, I ran once a day, except two times I ran 2 times in one day. I averaged 80 miles/week, which is on the low side. My first marathon I averaged around 100 miles/week.

**Do you cross train...?** I do plyometrics about 2 times/week. I have been doing a hip/core exercise program, but I did not do it while training for Portland.

**How many calories a day do you eat?** I don't count, I just eat until I am full, and then usually a little more. I would say at least 3000/day.

**How many meals/snacks?** 3 meals, 1 or 2 snacks at work.

**Do you use supplements?** I try to get everything I need in my diet.

**Have you run the Portland Marathon before?**  
First time

**What was your final time?** 2:28:41

**What was going through your mind once you were in the lead?** Getting to the finish line. I didn't get the lead until about a mile to go, so second place was very close to me. In the marathon, you can hit the wall at any point, so I just focused on getting to the finish and hoping my legs would last just a little longer.

**What did you feel when you cross the finish line?** I was so happy, as my first marathon went very badly. I coached myself for this one, so I was happy that my training worked. I overtrained for my first marathon (I lived in Boulder, CO at the time and was being coached by someone else), so my goal for Portland was to make sure I didn't overtrain and get to the finish line without falling apart. Also, my calves had started hurting at around 13 miles and kept getting progressively worse, so by the time I finished and stopped, I couldn't even stand up. I spent 45 minutes in the medical tent, my calves were so locked up. The medical staff did a wonderful job helping me out. They gave me an IV, which I refused at first, but it was super helpful.

**What did you eat for the rest of the day?** Post race snack, first meal, other snacks that evening? Immediately after, I got a banana and orange. A little later on I had an energy bar. Then pizza later in the evening...And lots of water.



**Eric Griffiths**

Winner of the 2010 Portland Marathon





## 2010 ICF Dragonboat World Championships

Barbara Wells, as part of Team USA (International “Dream Team” for the sport of Dragonboat racing) brought home three Silver medals with the Women Masters and two Bronze with Mixed Masters Teams from Szeged, Hungary this year.

The Visual Information Specialist, Medical Media, Education Division since 2003 and the Work Study Supervisor for the Portland VA Medical Center and outlying CBOCs since 2006, Wells also regularly participates in the Portland-Kaohsiung Sister City Association hosted annual Portland Rose Festival Dragonboat Races.

“I only thought I was fit before I started!” Wells said, laughing. Her local team, the Portland Wasabi Paddling Club, works out together six days a week, and then some. Wells is looking forward to the 2012 competition to be held in Hong Kong, China.



**What is Dragonboat Racing?** A dragonboat is a human-powered boat (Paddled Water Craft) traditionally made of teak wood; traditional long boats of various designs and sizes are found throughout Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands. Dragon boats are generally rigged with decorative Chinese dragon heads and tails for competition vents through vary in length dependant on crew size which will vary from small dragon boats with 10 paddlers, up to the massive traditional boars which have upwards of 50-80+ paddlers, plus drummers and sweep. The team paddling sport of dragon boat racing which originated in China over 2000 years ago. While competition has taken place annually for more than 20 centuries as part of folk ritual, it emerges in modern times as an international sport in Hong Kong in 1976.



# *American Indian Heritage Month*

## *Recognizing women Veterans in a “traditional” way*

*Photos by Michael Moody*

On November 19, 2010, a group of Native American women gathered at the Portland VAMC to participate in an American Indian Heritage Month celebration. Led by Rosie Arevalo, the Native American Special Emphasis Program Manager, more than thirty people gathered in Portland for the “Honoring Women Veterans” ceremony.

Rosie Arevalo, a nurse at the medical center, performed a heartfelt Blanket Ceremony. Five women, all Native American Veterans who work at the medical center were honored and presented with beautiful hand-made quilts. Rosie took time with each of the five women who were honored to hand pick the perfect quilt in a tribute to each woman individually. She wrapped each person in her quilt and embrace as a mother would embrace her child. “It was a beautiful ceremony, recognizing women Veterans in a traditional way,” said Judy Ulibarri, RN, Rural Mental Health Program. “The whole event was ceremonial, that’s what made it so beautiful.” The event also included the sharing of life stories of women Veterans from all Indian Nations and recognized women for their military service.





# Caregivers:

Caregivers maximizing Veteran independence, dignity...

Sherri Bean married her husband, Vietnam Veteran, Gary Bean over 29 years ago. "We promised to take care of one another when we married," said Sherri. She has stayed by her husband's side every step of the way. Lately, however, taking care of Gary has gotten a little more complicated. Maintaining his health for the last three years has required a number of surgeries and hospital appointments at Oregon's three VA facilities in Roseburg, White City and Portland.

Recently, Gary needed to stay at the Portland VAMC radiation-lodging unit, for eight weeks of radiation treatment for lung cancer. While Gary was in Portland, Sherri stayed home in Eugene, Ore. to hold down the fort. Gary was on his first week of treatment when the VA nursing staff noticed that he was struggling to remember little things, such as his keys, laptop and navigating around the VA campus. That's when Sherri got a call from Joyce Willison, social worker, who recognized that Gary might need a little help. The social work staff contacted Sherri to see if she could stay in the lodging unit with Gary as his caretaker until he completed his treatment. They did not have to ask twice. The 100-mile drive from Eugene to Portland was a short drive for Sherri. Friends and family were willing to take care of the dogs, making the trip easier. "Having another set of eyes not affected by drugs has made a huge difference," said Gary. Sherri and Gary agreed that they have zero complaints about the VA. "Everyone has been bending over backwards to help us, especially the nursing staff," Sherri said. She has not had much time for herself, "but my main job now is to make sure he eats, help him remember his keys and a hug once in a while does a lot of good".

Caregiver Support Coordinator, Ryan Weller



said, "One of the things we provide caregivers is assistance with respite care or adult day care.... "Just about every family member or spouse is a caregiver to a Veteran who receives care at the VA," Weller said. Respite care and adult day care services provide the family members a chance to go shopping, chat with a friend and get away from the day-to-day responsibility of taking care of the Veteran".

Caregiver support groups offer the caregiver the opportunity to connect with others going through similar experiences and help remind them that they are not alone. Caregiving can also be a rewarding experience to help maximize the Veteran's independence and dignity.

National Family Caregiver Month is a chance to honor the 65 million selfless family caregivers who assist and support chronically ill, disabled or aged family members. If you know a Family Caregiver take the time to say "thank you."



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